Anasarca

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To Robert P. Dowman M. D

Influenced, Sir, not only by a consideration of your high medical qualifications, but also affected with a sense of your politeness towards me, & the advantage which I derived from your instructions, the following Inaugural Dissertation is very respectfully dedicated to you, by your

Friend & Pupil

The Author.

An Inaugural Dissertation On Anasarca

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Previous to the immediate consideration of the subject which I have selected, I will make a few remarks, on the nature of dropsy generally.

Dropsy may be defined a preternatural collection of a serous or watery fluid, in some part of the body.

In a healthy state of the system, there is always a considerable quantity of fluid thrown into every cavity of the body, which is taken up, by the Lymphatics. In a large majority of cases, dropsy is the result of an increased exhalation of this fluid. —

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Perusing the works of European Writers, we will find, that most of them consider it as a disease originating in debility. But that it is also frequently associated with an excited and febrile state of the system, is a fact which was first clearly established in this Country, by the late distinguished Dr. Rush.

Dr. Blackall considers the urine as a criterion, whereby we may discriminate between the two species of dropsy. In the Tonic, he says, the urine is scanty, high coloured, deposits no sediment, and coagulates by heat and the Nitric acid. In the Atonic, it is pale, scanty &c, but does not coagulate as the former. But I consider the pulse (the grand Index of the system) a

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Anasarca first discovers itself, by a swelling of the feet and ankles, appearing in the evening & disappearing for a time in the morning; the tumefaction is soft & inelastic, indentations being readily formed by pressure. Gradually the swelling ascends, occupying the abdomen, or extending higher up, so as to constitute an universal Anasarca. There is now difficult & uneasy respiration, the cellular membrane of the lungs, being also affected, the bowels are constipated, the urine scanty, the surface dry, accompanied with more or less febrile action. As the disease advances, there is much torpor & distension, and ultimately the patient sinks, by debility.

The causes of Anasarca are the same as those of dropsy generally, to wit,

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preceding diseases, as the Intermittent Fever, Podagra, Dysentery, Diarrhœa, Phthisis, Exanthematic affections as Scarlatina and Erysipelas, Visceral affections. Sometimes dropsy is the consequence of debility, when we may suppose the absorbent apparatus to be deficient in action. Hard drinking is also a frequent cause.

In the cure of Anasarca we form two general indications, 1st To evacuate the water collected & 2nd To prevent a reaccumulation.

I have before remarked, that there were two forms of dropsy, namely the Tonic & Atonic. I shall first treat of the remedies proper for the Tonic form, or that attended with an excited state of the system.—

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Here the means usually resorted to for depleting and reducing the system become necessary. —

Venesection. The pulse being full and active, accompanied also with other marks of a phlogistic diathesis, we cannot hesitate as to the propriety of the remedy. In the use of bloodletting, we must be regulated by the state of the system, and the degree of arterial excitement. In some cases, pretty copious & repeated bleeding is requisite; in other cases only moderate bleeding.

Cathartics. These constitute a very important class of medicines, in the treatment of dropsy. They operate by diminishing inflammatory action, & invigorating the powers of absorption. Formerly it was customary to give the most drastic. With

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much more benefit, can we resort to the Saline & Tartrate preparations. The Supertartrate of Potash & Jalap in combination, are the most important articles of this class. Their effects are sometimes exceedingly prompt; & they have often dispersed dropsical swellings, without the aid of any other remedy. —

Diuretics. At the head of this list, the Cremor Tartar, indisputably stands. At present it meets with the concurrent approbation of physicians. It was originally introduced to public notice, by Dr. Home of Edinburg. It frequently acts by a combined operation on the Kidnies & bowels. When we wish to augment its diuretic powers, we should give at the same time a considerable quantity of water. It is now generally admitted, although hitherto a subject of dispute,

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among physicians, that it is unnecessary to restrain patients in the use of water. The diuretic effects of medicine are thereby certainly very much increased.

Scilla Maritima. This is an invaluable diuretic in every variety of dropsy. It must be recollected, however, that it is stimulant in its operation, & hence improper, when the disease is accompanied with febrile action. It is highly improved by a combination with Calomel. With respect to the dose, it should be given so as to excite a moderate degree of nausea.

Particularly adapted to febrile cases is the Nitras Potassa. The continued use of this medicine has the effect of impairing the digestive organs; & hence when it has been employed, sufficiently long to test its

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Fixed Alkalis — are also recommended as pretty good diuretics; of which the Potash seems preferable.

Some of the Alliaceæ are occasionally employed as diuretics.

Apium Petroselinum. This though a domestic remedy, is yet an active diuretic. Every part of the plant possesses this property, but the root in decoction is preferable. —

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of very beneficial effects. Where other measures have been unavailingly used, they are well worthy of a trial.

MERCURY. In southern climates, dropsy is very frequently associated, with visceral affections, & in those cases, mercury becomes indispensably necessary. It should be urged to the extent of a moderate salivation.

In closing this part of my subject, I might here enumerate, Abstinence, low diet, hard labour, fear, & other causes ~~of~~ evidently of a debilitating nature, which have occasionally done good, in this species of dropsy. Severals such cases are related by Dr. Rush.

I proceed secondly to consider the other form, in which anasarca appears,

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The remedies here, should be such stimulant substances as are calculated to excite general vigor, or determine the fluids to the urinary organs.

Tonics. The best tonic medicines are the Peruvian Bark, vegetable Bitters & Chalybeates. The diet should be nutritive & Exercise particularly enjoined, proportioned to the strength of the patient. It should be of the active kind, such as moderate walking & riding on horseback.

Diuretics. The first of the stimulant diuretics which I shall name, is the Polygala Senega. Being tonic and actively diuretic, it is well adapted to those cases attended with an enfeebled

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The Pyrola Umbellata, known also by the name of Pippsissewa, has been lately introduced as a remedy for dropsy, & is represented to have been beneficial. Being analagous to the preceding article, it is well worthy of a farther trial.

The Tincture of Cantharides is a very active diuretic in those cases, & should be liberally employed, as its irritating effects are thereby prevented

Eupatorium Perfoliatum.
Being tonic & diaphoretic, it appears well adapted to those cases, originating in miasmatic situations.

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a priori, from the well known operation of digitalis, that it ought to be located with those remedies, for the preceding form of Anasarca, but experience has proven its inutility. It was originally introduced by the celebrated Dr. Withering, with high commendations. Various & diversified have been the reports, with regard to its efficacy. Dr. Ferriar relates a great many cases, in which comparative trials were made with the digitalis & the Supertartras Potassa, from which it appears that the latter medicine was very far superior. Nevertheless abundant testimony could be adduced of its powers, in almost every species of dropsy; and we may suppose that the diversified accounts have originated from the administration of the medicine, in different stages of the system. Dr. Chapman is of opinion

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that it is in atonic cases, that the medicine decidedly displays its best powers. We should be cautious not to proceed too far with the medicine, unless its mode of operation be evident, as it possesses the peculiarity of remaining dormant for some time, & of suddenly developing its full effects.—

I come ~~lastly~~ now to consider the <u>local treatment</u> of Anasarca, having detailed the most important general remedies.

When the extremities are much distended with water, which is accompanied with considerable uneasiness, much relief may be obtained, by evacuating it. This should be effected by making small punctures with a lancet; which should not be too deep, as

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Erysipelatous inflammation & gangrene might otherwise result. These affections sometimes occur in cellular dropsy, especially in the extremities.

Either from the extreme distension produced by the effused fluid, or from the torpid action of the capillary vessels, the vitality of the integuments, is occasionally so much impaired, as to cause gangrene or mortification.—

Under such circumstances, blisters which are so beneficial to arrest the progress of mortification, preceded by inflammation, (& which I would observe were introduced by Dr. Physic) are totally inadmissible: indeed they sometimes occasion the very mischief in question.

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Dr. Chapman, is to compress the extremity both above & below, the part affected with a flannel roller tightly applied. This operates on a principle easily applicable; namely by imparting tone & warmth to the enfeebled limb, whereby it is enabled to resist the farther extension of the putrefactive process. This method of treatment, I believe, originated with Dr. Chapman.

It only remains now, for me to describe the method of fulfilling the second general indication of cure, to wit, to prevent the reaccumulation of water.

When the case, is in some degree local, frictions & the laced stocking are of considerable service, in preventing the reproduction of water.—

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With respect to the general remedies, we should resort to Tonics, the best of which are the Cinchona & Chalybeates.

Should tonics not prove effectual, but on the contrary should there be a strong predisposition to an accumulation of water, we must endeavor to change the state of the system, by introducing mercury gradually, as an alterative. If the patient should be incapable of bearing the operation of this medicine, the Nitric acid may be advantageously substituted.

The diet should be nutritive, and Exercise particularly enforced. The latter has of itself frequently effected a cure of the dropsy.

Finis.

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